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## Voting Tough

"People are just kind of knee-jerking," said Rep. Howard Wolpe (D-Mich.) of the foreign-aid authorization bill passed by the House. "There is something in there for everyone," said Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Dante Fascell (D-Fla.). Quite so. As with Winston Churchill's rejected pudding, whatever comes of the melding of the House aid bill with an earlier Senate version, it will probably have no theme.

Or, looked at another way, its theme will have less to do with content than with method. The mish-mash to emerge from a joint House-Senate conference will likely stand as another example of the congressional malpractice that Secretary of State George Shultz regularly and rightly deplores: the attempt by 535 members of Congress, playing to as many galleries, to micromanage the exact conduct of this or that particular piece of foreign policy.

Not that a doctrinal theme won't be claimed. There has to be a "trend"; mere incoherence is not acceptable for great deliberative bodies. Hence the talk of a new, pervasive, "angry" mood—something on the order of a bipartisan congressional consensus behind a Reagan Doctrine. The idea of sticking it to Marx and Lenin by supporting resistance movements around the world, it is said, has taken root even among the Democrats on Capitol Hill.

Now that may be so, if the Reagan Doctrine is defined as looking and talking tough as distinct from acting tough. If the Reagan record is distinguished from the Reagan rhetoric in, say, Lebanon, or in countering terrorism when confronted by it, or even in

Central America, then it may be so that Reaganism is catching on in Congress.

But a closer look at the way votes were registered—and at what the House was voting on—raises serious questions about the depth of any congressional conversion to anticommunist interventionism. This was a so-called "authorization" bill, an open invitation to striking poses and making "statements" to the electorate.

The money to back up the spending authorizations will have to be appropriated in separate legislation later in the year. As often as not, the process bogs down when you are talking money. Then, Congress falls back on a "continuing resolution" to maintain spending at the previous year's level. Thus last week's "statements" buy time and protection. They are not necessarily the measure of a lasting mood.

What they said about the current mood, according to Rep. Vin Weber (R-Minn.), is that "members of Congress don't want to look weak right now." Lingering frustration over the hostage crisis apparently helped make the lawmakers combative. But congressional sources cite a deeper future concern. Many Democrats were looking ahead to what they think could be their area of greatest vulnerability in the congressional elections next year.

Soft-on-Freedom-Fighters is an issue a lot of Democrats figure they don't need. It is also an issue that Ronald Reagan is well positioned to exploit on behalf of Republican candidates. Hence the turnaround last month by House Democrats on "covert" aid for the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries (contras).

And hence the clear voting pattern by the Democrats on aid for resistance forces in Cambodia, Afghanistan—and Angola. You will note in each instance a triumph of showing-the-flag over substance.

The \$5 million in overt aid for anti-communist rebels in Cambodia is as nothing compared to the sums that are bruited about for covert assistance. The same may be said for the \$15 million of above-board aid to rebels in Afghanistan. There was much ado about lifting a nine-year-old, one-of-a-kind congressional ban on assistance to anti-communist forces in Angola. But the practical effect, for the moment, amounts to nothing, assuming the administration's denial of any immediate designs for Angola can be taken on its face.

The Angola vote removes a vestige of the so-called Vietnam Syndrome—a symbol of supposed American irresolution. But any U.S. intervention in the Angolan struggle that requires money will still be subject to congressional control of the purse strings. In each of these instances, the Democrats were taking pains to participate in what one legislative aide described as "raising the American flag over the battlefield."

The Democrats were also making it impossible for Republicans to oppose a foreign aid bill that the administration thinks is too long on economic aid and too short on weapons of war. Perhaps the surest sign that last week's House action on foreign aid is something less than a clarion call for a more activist, interventionist campaign against communism around the world is that, in the end, the omnibus bill was passed by an unrecorded voice vote.